

Johnston County Natural Areas Inventory

HANNAH CREEK SWAMP

Site Number: 35

Site Significance: County

Ownership: Private

Size: about 1235 acres

Quadrangles: Four Oaks, Four Oaks NE,
Newton Grove North

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This creek contains a mature swamp forest along most of its length. There are relatively few swamp forests of any length in the county, and this swamp extends for roughly 12 miles.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The Howell Woods preserve site lies just to the east (downstream) of the natural area. The Hannah Creek Sandhill adjoins this site on the northeast, near the lower end of the swamp. This swamp is included within the (Upper) Neuse River Megasite but is not included within any macrosite.

SITE DESCRIPTION: Hannah Creek flows eastward across the south-central portion of Johnston County, originating north of Benson and terminating in Mill Creek along the south border of Howell Woods near Bentonville. The creek flows for at least 12 miles, and despite that length, it has a very narrow floodplain nearly throughout, averaging only 1/4-mile in width. A floodplain this narrow does not usually contain swamp vegetation except in small areas, often where partly impounded by a road bank or beaver ponds. Although the creek is bisected at least seven times by roads, it retains swampy conditions over the 12 miles, and the swamps are not caused by water backing up behind the road banks.

The vegetation along the creek seems to be consistent over most of its length. The canopy is essentially deciduous, except for scattered loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*). Most trees have swollen bases due to constant standing water. Common canopy trees are swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and ash (*Fraxinus* spp.). No bald-cypresses (*Taxodium distichum*) were noted during brief stops at several bridge crossings during the inventory, though it is likely that this tree is present along the creek. Because of the standing water in much of the area, few shrubs are present, and typical floodplain shrubs such as cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*), which prefer damp but not saturated soils, are scarce. The natural community along the creek is best called a Cypress-Gum Swamp, Blackwater subtype rather than a Coastal Plain Small Stream Swamp, as the latter tends to contain a mix of upland species or at least bottomland species such as oaks.

The swamp presumably has important values for wildlife. It is likely that a few beaver ponds are present along the creek. The floodplain forests are important nesting habitats for wildlife such as warblers, woodpeckers, frogs, and turtles.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The forests need little management. They have been fragmented on many occasions already by road crossings. Any additional crossings, even by powerlines, would be detrimental, because they would add sediment to the creek and allow